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- 5.—*The Tragedies of Sophocles. A New Translation, with a Biographical Essay.* By E. H. PLUMPTRE, M. A. Alexander Strahan: London. 1865. 2 vols. 12mo. pp. xcix., 208, 283.

THE merits of Mr. Plumptre's *Sophocles* have been so generally acknowledged, both in England and America, that we hardly need re-echo the common opinion. The work has also stood a harder test than the severest critics can apply to a modern translation of an ancient classic,—it has proved itself readable, and has made *Sophocles* known to a class of readers to whom the Greek and the older versions were alike inaccessible. Readers of this class, not scholars or professional critics, settle the reputation and value of a work like this. Witness the host of translations of *Homer* which have recently appeared in England. Each is made according to some theory of its author as to the proper metre for translating *Homer*, and we have the old poet served up in every imaginable form,—*Spenserian stanzas*, *ballad measures*, *hexameters*, and *blank verse*; but however sound each theory appears, when it is plausibly stated, and however each may command the assent of able scholars, no one of these translations, we venture to say, will ever become really popular, or indeed be read *through* by any one whose enthusiasm has not been kindled in youth by the genuine *Homer* in his native *Ionic*. But while these learned productions are less read, even in England and America, than *Homer* himself, *Pope's Homer*, which sets at defiance all modern theories of translation, which recognizes not even the principles in which all other translators agree, which is decidedly the most un-Homeric of all, is read, and read *through*, and still remains the only popular translation. *Pope* has one quality which all the others lack,—he is readable.

The translator of *Sophocles* is fortunately less troubled than the translator of *Homer* in deciding upon his metre. With almost complete unanimity, the English ten syllable iambic verse has been chosen to represent the Greek iambic trimeter; and we are glad to see that Mr. Plumptre has accepted it without hesitation in his translation of the dialogue. Chiefly owing to the preponderance of monosyllables in English, our verse of ten syllables appears to the ear as long as a Greek verse of twelve syllables; and our *Alexandrine* is much too slow and heavy to represent its exact metrical equivalent in Greek. When we consider the immense advantage gained by a translator who can use the metre of the original, we need not be surprised at finding Mr. Plumptre's version of the dialogue of *Sophocles* by far the most successful part of his work. He here combines spirit and elegance with

great fidelity to both the thought and the expression of the original. In the choral passages there is a harder problem to solve, and equal success would show far greater merit. Three courses are here open to the translator. He may attempt to render each verse by the exact rhythmical equivalent; he may decide for himself what English verse best represents each Greek verse, as Mr. Blackie in his *Æschylus*, and many recent translators of Homer have done; or he may disregard the Greek metres altogether, and merely render each chorus by an English lyric poem. Mr. Plumptre has chosen the last course, and goes so far as to translate strophe and antistrophe by different metres. He aims merely at "maintaining a general harmony of tone between the corresponding members of a choral ode." A poet here has a hard choice to make. He is warned against attempting the second course by the discord in the camp of the translators of Homer; for while there is such a vigorous contest as to the true representative of the Homeric hexameter, what hope is there that any two scholars will agree upon the equivalents of choriambics and dochmiacs? And as to the first course, the poetic inspiration which could survive imprisonment in real English choriambics and dochmiacs, through the weary length of seven tragedies, can safely defy criticism under any metrical form it may choose to adopt. It is not surprising, therefore, that Mr. Plumptre's choral odes are much less Sophoclean than the dialogue. In fact, such choruses as the first of the *Antigone* and the *Εὐίππων, ξένε, τᾶσδε χάρας* in the *Œdipus Coloneus* are, like the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, really inaccessible to those who cannot read them in Greek, — although very pretty and pleasant songs containing the same ideas may be written in other languages.

Mr. Plumptre's translation is in the fullest sense original. He has, he tells us, "but the scantiest possible acquaintance" with the works of his predecessors; and his own has doubtless gained thereby more than it has lost. This independent course renders a translator more liable to mistakes, while it makes an occasional blunder pardonable. We will mention a few instances of this kind, some of which are so obvious that it is wonderful how they could have escaped the translator's notice in the proof-sheets.

In *Antig.* 263, Mr. Plumptre translates, "And so he 'scaped our ken." Whether we read with the Mss. *ἔφηνε τὸ μὴ εἶδέναι*, or adopt any of the emendations made to avoid the anapest, the meaning must be the same, *Every one denied all knowledge, or refused to know.*

In *Antig.* 500, he translates, "Of all thy words not one pleases me now, nor aye is like to please," overlooking the change from *ἀρεστόν* *οὐδέν* to *μηδ' ἀρεσθελί ποτέ*, and *may they never please me!*

In Antig. 637, 638, he gives,

"No marriage weighs one moment in the scales  
With me, while thou art prospering in thy reign."

But a glance at the preceding clause, "Do thou direct with thy wise counsels," shows that σοῦ καλῶς ἡγουμένου refers to Creon's parental, not his regal authority. The son means to say that no marriage shall weigh one moment against his father's *good* advice, καλῶς containing the same intentional ambiguity as ἀπορβοῖς, vs. 636.

Antig. 754, κλαίων φρενώσεις, ὧν φρενῶν αὐτὸς κενός, which Dr. Donaldson has neatly rendered, "Unschooled thyself, beware of schooling me," is strangely mistranslated by Mr. Plumptre, "To thy cost thou shalt learn wisdom, having none thyself."

Antig. 1016–1018, he thus translates:—

"Our sacred hearths are full of food for dogs  
And birds unclean, the flesh of that poor wretch," etc.

Here the mistake seems to be chiefly in construction, the meaning being that the altars are infected *by means of* (ὑπὸ) dogs and birds with the *eaten flesh* (βορᾶς) of the son of Œdipus. The meaning of βορᾶς will be seen by reference to Æsch. Agam. 1220, where Cassandra has a vision of the murdered children of Thyestes, χεῖρας κρεῶν πλήθοντες οἰκείας βορᾶς, i. e. *with their hands full of their own flesh which was taken as food*. In Antig. 1018 we have a genitive (γόνου) in the place of οἰκείας, and βορᾶς is governed by πλήρεις.

In Antig. 1232, Mr. Plumptre mars the effect of the tragic scene in the tomb by making Hæmon spit in his father's face just before he stabs himself. He translates, "Glared at him, spat upon his face, and draws, still answering nought, the sharp two-edged sword." But πτύσας προσώπῳ must mean *with a look of loathing*, just as μειδιάσας προσώπῳ means *with a smiling face*. The other interpretation would seem at least to require εἰς πρόσωπον.

In Œdip. Colon. 581, "And [how] shall this, the gain thou bring'st, be clear?" the word *how*, translating ποῖῳ, must have been omitted by a misprint.

Œdip. Colon. 1262, 1263, Mr. Plumptre translates,—

"And she, my sister, as it seems, provides  
For this poor life its daily sustenance."

Polynices has just spoken of the foul dress and uncombed hair of Œdipus, and now he says that his food is *close akin to these* (ἀδελφὰ τούτοις). Mr. Plumptre seems to mistake ἀδελφὰ for ἀδελφή, in spite of the metre, and to make it the subject of φορεῖ.

In Œdip. Colon. 1299,—

"The dread Erinys is the chiefest cause,"—

"the" is probably a misprint for *thy*, as Sophocles says τὴν σὴν Ἐρινύν.

Electr. 20 is translated, "before ye enter, taking rest, the roof of living man." The Greek is πρὶν οὖν τιν' ἀνδρῶν ἐξοδοιπορεῖν στέγης, *before any man comes out from his house*.

Electr. 544, 545, is translated, "Or was it that her father [Agamemnon] cast aside, cold-blooded, hard, all yearning for my child, which Menelaos had?" Here there is certainly room for difference of opinion; but we can hardly doubt that every one, on second thought, will accept the interpretation of the Scholia, and render the last clause, *Μενέλεω δ' ἐνῆν, while he had (yearning) for the children of Menelaos*. Hermann points out the position of μέν in vs. 544, which seems decisive as to the construction.

We notice one remarkable mistake in the Introduction, p. xliv. Mr. Plumptre is describing the memorable scene in the Athenian theatre, when the young Sophocles first appeared in tragedy as the rival of Æschylus. The excitement was intense, and the audience were divided into nearly equal parties, each eager for the success of its favorite. It was the usual duty of the chief Archon to choose by lot five judges, from a limited number of candidates previously designated by the Senate, to decide the contest and award the prizes. The Archon was afraid that any decision given by judges thus appointed would excite a tumult among the partisans of the defeated poet. Just in time to relieve him from his trouble, Cimon and the other nine generals entered the theatre, having returned from their expedition to Scyros with the bones of Theseus. He did not allow them to withdraw, after they had performed the sacrifice to Bacchus for which they came, but appointed them judges of the contest, and compelled them to decide between the rival poets. The result was the triumph of Sophocles and the bitter mortification of Æschylus. This is the story, as told by Plutarch. Mr. Plumptre, however, says of the generals, that the magistrate "stopped them before they withdrew, and bound them by an oath to name ten judges, one from each tribe, the best and worthiest they could find, whose names would guard against the least suspicion of unfairness." This mistake shows that Mr. Plumptre took his story from Plutarch himself, and not from any modern account; but he misunderstands the passage. Plutarch says (Cim. § 8) : οὐκ ἀφῆκεν αὐτοὺς ἀπελθεῖν, ἀλλ' ὀρκώσας ἡνάγκασε καθίσαι καὶ κρίναι δέκα ὄντας, ἀπὸ φυλῆς μιᾶς ἕκαστον, — i. e. *The magistrate did not let the generals leave the theatre, but he administered the judges' oath to them, and compelled them to sit and judge, they being ten, each representing one tribe*. Mr. Plumptre seems to translate κρίναι δέκα ὄντας, *to choose ten judges*, and then to adapt the rest of the story as best he can to that interpretation.

These instances of carelessness are exceptions in Mr. Plumptre's work, which is generally done with great care and fidelity, and shows an accurate and scholarly acquaintance with the letter and the spirit of the original.

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6. — *Poems of JOHN JAMES PIATT.* Cincinnati: R. W. Carroll & Co. 1868. 12mo. pp. 231.

ONE of the dreams of our earlier horoscope-mongers was, that a poet should come out of the West, fashioned on a scale somewhat proportioned to our geographical pretensions. Our rivers, forests, mountains, cataracts, prairies, and inland seas were to find in him their antitype and voice. Shaggy he was to be, brown-fisted, careless of proprieties, unhampered by tradition, his Pegasus of the half-horse, half-alligator breed. By him at last the epos of the New World was to be fitly sung, the great tragi-comedy of democracy put upon the stage for all time. It was a cheap vision, for it cost no thought; and, like all judicious prophecy, it muffled itself from criticism in the loose drapery of its terms. Till the advent of this splendid apparition, who should dare affirm positively that he would never come? that, indeed, he was impossible? And yet his impossibility was demonstrable, nevertheless.

Supposing a great poet to be born in the West, though he would naturally levy upon what had always been familiar to his eyes for his images and illustrations, he would almost as certainly look for his ideal somewhere outside of the life that lay immediately about him. Life in its large sense, and not as it is temporarily modified by manners or politics, is the only subject of the poet; and though its elements lie always close at hand, yet in its unity it seems always infinitely distant, and the difference of angle at which it is seen in India and in Minnesota is almost inappreciable. Moreover, a rooted discontent seems always to underlie all great poetry, if it be not even the motive of it. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* paint manners that are only here and there incidentally true to the actual, but which in their larger truth had either never existed or had long since passed away. Had Dante's scope been narrowed to contemporary Italy, the *Divina Commedia* would have been a picture-book merely. But his theme was Man, and the vision that inspired him was of an Italy that never was nor could be, his political theories as abstract as those of Plato or Spinoza. Shakespeare shows us less of the England that then was than any other considerable poet of his time. The struggle of Goethe's whole life was to emancipate himself from Germany, and fill his lungs for once with a more universal air.